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ABSTRACT

As part of a departmental restructuring to improve the preservice training of teachers through early and frequent field-based experiences, Our Lady of the Lake University (Texas) has developed partnerships with both public and private schools in San Antonio (Texas). One of the most successful partnerships has been the development and implementation of a field-based course at Rodriguez Elementary School in San Antonio Independent School District. This course provides opportunities for classroom teachers to work directly with preservice teachers within the school setting. The classroom teachers assist the university faculty in educating, supervising, observing, and coaching the preservice teachers. This opportunity to incorporate preservice teachers into the classrooms of Rodriguez is due in part to another partnership Rodriguez developed with Optical Data. This project required release time for teachers to work on the partnership. The Optical Data project aimed at developing a pilot program at Rodriguez using a laser disc science program. Preservice students work in pairs to lead a class without the presence of the cooperating teacher. Before and after these sessions the students and participating teachers meet to discuss the classes. Teachers evaluate and report on the student's progress. Cooperating teachers, faculty, and students are all extremely positive about the program which was considered unique, reciprocal and generally successful. (JB)

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Restructuring Teacher Education With The Help of Classroom Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The restructuring of the teacher education program at Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU) is focused on improving preservice training of teacher education candidates through early and frequent field-based experiences. The Department of Education at OLLU has developed uniwque partnerships with both public and private schools in San Antonio to provide this field-based training. One of the most successful partnerships has been the development and implementation of a field-base course at Rodriguez Elementary School in San Antonio ISD. This courdse has provided opportunities for classroom teachers to work directly with preservice teachers within the school setting. The classroom teachers are assisting the university faculty in educating, supervising, observing, and coaching the preservice teachers. This wonderful opportunity to incorporate our preservice teachers into the classrooms of Rodriguez was the result of another partnership Rodriguez developed with Optical Data. Rodriguez's need for release time for teachers to work on this partnership coupled with Our Lady of the Lake University's need to field-base its preservice teachers has created a unique, reciprocal, and successful venture.

Restructuring a Teacher Education Program With The Help of Classroom Teachers

In the spring of 1991, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) took a leadership role in restructuring teacher education and training. The 72nd Texas Legislature dedicated 10 million dollars to assist TEA in this restructuring process which was aggressively supported by Governor Ann Richards and Education Commissioner, Lionel Meno. TEA established eight Texas Centers for Professional Development and Technology to restructure teacher education in Texas. In the spring of 1993, TEA established five additional centers which brings the total number of Texas Professional Development and Technology Centers to thirteen. These Centers are spread out across Texas from El Paso to Beaumont from Lubbock to Laredo. While these centers' programs are quite diverse, they share a commitment to collaboratively providing field-based teacher preservice education, staff development, and teaching and learning opportunities using state-of-the-art technology. The expected outcomes of each center's initiative will be successful students, effective teachers, life-long learners, and the integration of technology (Texas Education Agency, 1993).

Our interest in this restructuring of teacher education stems from our direct involvement with the San Antonio based Center for Educational Development and Excellence (CEDE) center was formed to be a collaborative community, a center for inquiry dedicated to continuous life-long development of teachers as learners in a culturally diverse, technologically enriched, educational environment. This center is unique in that it involves one public university, four private universities, and one community college in the San Antonio area: The University of Texas at San Antonio, Trinity University, Incarnate Word College, Our Lady of the Lake University, St. Mary's University, and San Antonio College. Five school districts are also involved as partners of CEDE: Northside ISD, Northeast ISD, San Antonio ISD, Harlandale ISD, and Edgewood ISD. Region 20 Educational Service Center and a variety of community institutions in San Antonio completes the partnership of CEDE. This unparalleled collaboration among educational and community institutions is affecting the professional development of teachers in a coordinated, community-wide manner. CEDE's explicit goals include the incorporation of collaboration, field-based training, staff development and technology in the field of education (Center for Educational Development and Excellence\Centro Educational para el Desarrollo y Excelencia (CEDE), 1992).

While there are many aspects of CEDE, the partnership ventures that have developed between the universities and their Professional Development Schools have been the most exciting and rewarding. These ventures have enabled the universities to network with school personnel to enhance and expand the teacher education programs. The unanimous praise of these partnerships is a testimony to what can occur when universities join forces with local schools.

Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU), a small private university located in inner-city San Antonio, has partnered with Rodriguez Elementary School in San Antonio ISD. OLLU has a total enrollment of 3100 students, and 75% of the undergraduate students are Hispanic. One of the most successful aspects of our partnership has been the development and implementation of a field-base course at Rodriguez Elementary. This course has provided opportunities for classroom teachers to work directly with preservice teachers within the school setting. The classroom teachers are assisting the university faculty in educating, supervising, observing, coaching, and evaluating the preservice teachers.

This wonderful opportunity to incorporate our preservice teachers into the classrooms of Rodriguez was the result of another partnership Rodriguez developed with Optical Data. Rodriguez's need for release time for teachers to work on this

partnership coupled with Our Lady of the Lake University's need to field-base its preservice teachers has created a reciprocal and successful venture.

Optical Data Partnership

Rodriguez Elementary School, a small inner-city school which services a large Hispanic population, is part of San Antonio Independent School District. As a pilot school for the district's elementary long range technology plan, Rodriguez is attempting to utilize technology in a way that supplements and extends the traditional curriculum. To meet this goal, faculty and staff of Rodriguez regularly attend technology seminars. In October of 1992, Optical Data Corporation sponsored a technology seminar to display its laser disc science program and invite schools to submit research proposals using and evaluating this technology at the campus level.

After attending the seminar and seeing the package, the teachers at Rodriguez felt the Optical Data curriculum offered enormous possibilities. The curriculum centers around the visual images stored on the laser disc and proceeds through the Circle of Learning lesson cycle to become an interdisciplinary curriculum. Rodriguez Elementary School decided to develop a proposal with an oral language and concept formation emphasis. Its proposal was selected from over 150 applications to participate in the partnership with Optical Data and received

20,000 dollars worth of laser disc equipment, curriculum, and training to pursue the research outlined in the proposal.

The research is based on the belief that students will show a greater gain in language development, concept formation, and self confidence using laser disc technology than they will with only a textbook driven curriculum. The second belief is that teachers will demonstrate greater confidence, effectiveness, and enthusiasm in teaching science curriculum using laser disc technology. In order to fully test these beliefs, several different assessment techniques were proposed, and all of the assessments require close coordination between participating teachers at each grade level. Due to the complex research design involving 10 classes, collegial support and collaboration became necessities to ensure a successful research project. Rodriguez proposed a 90 minute weekly meeting session during school hours for participating teachers. During the meetings, the teachers draft 6 week curriculum plans which focus on the content and process objectives to be addressed. In addition, the assessment instruments are created prior to beginning of each grading period. It is hoped that through these two activities a common groundwork of instruction will be established. From this framework, each teacher is free to plan individual activities, accumulate necessary resources, and develop original extensions for her own classroom.

In order for the teachers to be able to meet during school hours, the problem of substitutes needed to be solved. Due to the CEDE collaborative, Rodriguez was able to call on the Our Lady of the Lake University for assistance.

Field-Based Coursework

In the past year, Our Lady of the Lake University has been field-basing a majority of its education courses. However, this would be the first opportunity for preservice teachers to actually teach prepared lessons and have complete control over classes without the teachers being present. While this was an exciting idea, it was also pretty terrifying for some of the students. It was at this point that we decided to place two students in each classroom for support. A faculty member from the university would be on campus and observe the preservice students in the classrooms.

The scheduling of students into the classrooms became a problem. In order to avoid usurping the teachers' assigned conference periods, the students needed to be scheduled into the classrooms at times other than their university class meeting times. It was decided that they would meet at the university one class period a week for theory and discussion and would be scheduled into the classrooms at Rodriguez for 90 minutes a week. Participation at Rodriguez was contingent upon the student's ability to coordinate the schedules.

Before and after the 90 minute block of time, the preservice teachers meet with the participating teachers to discuss the lessons, the things which worked and did not work, and strategies and grouping patterns used. Based on these discussions and the progress made within the classrooms, the teachers evaluate and report professional growth. This evaluation, combined with the university faculty's assessment, results in students' final grades for the course.

Student Reactions

The education faculty at OLLU are extremely pleased with the classroom teacher's training of the preservice teachers. This field-based training which the students are receiving at Rodriguez incorporates a hands-on approach into the teacher education program. It is the belief of the education faculty that these preservice teachers will be better prepared than their predecessors.

The reaction of the preservice students has been overwhelming positive. While they were very apprehensive at first, this apprehension has changed into an excitement for teaching.

Teacher Reactions

The teachers at Rodriguez are unanimously behind this newest component to the teacher training program. University students are given the opportunity to go beyond the passive observations

common in many programs and allowed to actually test the waters before plunging into student teaching. Questions about whether the university student is suited to teaching can be addressed early, so that career changes can be made if necessary, before the student is locked into a career plan.

The preservice teachers have been able to cover more material than substitutes normally would cover. The classroom teachers attribute this to a variety of factors: the low student/teacher ratio, the decrease in behavior disruptions, and the preservice teacher's accountability to both Rodriguez and Our Lady of the Lake University.

The preservice teachers have implemented a variety of teaching strategies including total group, cooperative groups, and one-on-one tutoring situations. Working as professional pairs within the classroom, differences of opinion were bound to occur; however these differences were resolved without intervention from the university faculty or the classroom teachers. Many different discipline techniques have also been employed with the cooperating teacher's permission; the logistics and effectiveness involved in these strategies have been extremely useful to both the preservice teachers and the classroom teachers.

With two preservice teachers in each classroom, the student/teacher ratio is very conducive to learning. A wonderful rapport has been established between the students at Rodriguez Elementary and the preservice teachers. The classroom teachers have even commented on this attachment. Many times during student teaching experiences, the interns become overly attached. Once an intern has lost the professional distance necessary for classroom management, reestablishing that respect takes time. Through this program, the question about how to keep professional distance is being addressed early in the preservice teacher's experiences. The classroom teachers feel that many of the preservice teachers show a natural aptitude for teaching. The success of our research with Optical Data is primarily due to the collaboration with the University. The teachers are able to concentrate on science curriculum development without concern about what is occurring in the classrooms.

Future Plans

Presently, plans for the spring are being drafted. Since new preservice students will be enrolled in the university classes, a new schedule will need to be developed. An introductory session, involving classroom teachers, preservice teachers, and university faculty, is planned prior to implementation. During this session various items will be discussed: grading procedures, attendance, current discipline

strategies, student expectations, and teacher expectations. This will allow for a smooth transition of the preservice teachers into the classrooms at Rodriguez.

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